

MALEKULA EFFIGY.

AS ILLUSTRATED BY A SPECIMEN IN THE QUEENSLAND
MUSEUM COLLECTIONS.

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(Plates VII. and VIII.)

WE have in our collection an effigy from Malekula, New Hebrides, and although specimens of this kind have been previously referred to, their growing scarcity warrants a few descriptive remarks to the accompanying plates. The south end of Malekula is inhabited by people materially different from other inhabitants of the island in a great many particulars, and who stand out as a peculiar race from any of the other natives of the New Hebrides group. Some of their remarkable characteristics are particularly noticeable in their dealing with their friends after death. Mr. Douglas Rannie, who spent some years in the islands, has been good enough to supply me with the following information:—"After death the cranium and as many of the bones as can conveniently be gathered are collected and put together in the form of an effigy resembling the human form. The body is composed of a framework made from bones, sticks, grass, and fibre all inlaid with clay, which is ornamented and painted with various coloured pigments, the whole being surmounted by the skull of the deceased, on which is replaced the original scalp which has previously been removed for the purpose. These effigies are then placed in upright positions around the walls of the council chamber known as the 'Amil' house. Arrows are shot into the eye-sockets, presumably to deprive the dead from all knowledge of the doings or actions of posterity. In many instances the most prized possessions of the deceased during life are placed within grasp of the effigy." Now, although these remarks may hold good in the main, our Queensland Museum specimen is, I think, not prepared quite in the same way, since I cannot discover the presence of human bones in the framework, with the exception of the typically elongate head, but is apparently simply put together with sticks, grass, and fibre, and matted together with clay. Individual specimens show considerable minor differences. Some have feet; ours has the appearance of walking on stilts, being minus feet; in addition, each knee is decorated with a small head. The Melbourne Museum specimens carry nothing in their hands—in fact, they do not possess them, they only appear to have stumps coming to a point; and whereas the latter possess most elaborate shoulders drawn to a great height over the head or mask with two faces on each shoulder one above the other, our specimen contains only one face on each shoulder and is not unduly prolonged.

